

# A Model Year

# A Model Year

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20

# poems by Gina Myers

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I.  
Young Professionals in the Rain





## Fable

Blame this day. Blame the stove  
& the curtain. Blame the oily dishwater.  
The prodigal has returned.  
You've taken the sword, now  
take the body too.  
The word *surrender* caught  
in my teeth. The filthy rusted nail.  
Dearest sister, I'm only asking  
what's been promised. The poison  
has reached your lungs now breathe.

## Brooklyn

Wires cross & re-cross:  
one bruise covers another.  
Pigeons & sky washed-  
out grey. The weight  
of a minute creases  
the back of the neck.  
The movement towards zero  
tucked into the center.  
Fog on the window  
expecting a new day,  
expecting warm breath  
& the pressure of a fingertip  
drawing a circle.  
Or the movement away.  
Repeating to repeat.  
The arc of a hand—  
gentle wave, slight turn.  
Leaves twist in the wind,  
brush across sidewalk.  
Edges unfold, smudge out  
with the brush of a thumb.

## Brazen Youth

Four years advantage in the race  
across the street. Half the pressure,  
twice the speed. The hard-learned  
lesson not every pigeon can  
be trusted. Kicking through leaves  
November crisp & sneaky sneaks  
passing notes. Who wants to pay  
for a soda anyway? Misused coffee  
cups & the imagined lives of co-workers  
a thousand times better than this  
ten to six day in day out.  
The imagined lives of forties on rooftops  
& fingernails flecked with silver  
spray paint. As if a photograph could catch  
it all or catch anything at all.  
Carrying the weight of our costumes  
through this downward spiral circle pit.  
The frenzied youth smashing  
up against one another. Now: counter-  
clockwise. Goodbye lovers & haters.  
Goodbye New York.

## Tuesday

Or today buying a wooden picture frame  
& its refusal to hang flat against the wall.

This doesn't change anything. The doorframe  
solid there, just waiting for someone to pass.

On the other side of the wall: children laughing.  
Add this to my list of failures: I have never seen

the tide rise or held a fragile life in my hand.  
Never a gentle knife, a knock in the wind.

My magazine rack securing my place in the world.  
The shelves of books a sign of the real.

The cup of tea I pour solves nothing.  
I make a list of all the things I'd like to break.

## Each Spring

Looking for my name  
in every pawn shop  
I'm not fit  
to be a politician's  
wife Laughing along  
Lake Shore Drive  
Pointing to all the places  
we'll never live  
Our plans for Mexico  
forgotten at the end  
of a novel  
4am post-bar text  
message The camera's 3rd eye  
wrapped inside a flag  
Each spring  
brings the promise  
of a new baseball season  
Outside Wrigley boys  
stand along N. Waveland Avenue  
with gloves on their hands  
Too young to have yet learned  
baseball is only  
good for heartache

## Elegy

Either the house was full or the tea leaves had dried.  
Either a house, or if not a house, a sparrow.  
If not words, then the meaning of words.  
Either it is lost, it is lost, or it is not lost.  
An open hand or a locked door.  
If a locked door then never any rest.  
Either a voice or voicelessness.  
Beginning or ending or nothing.  
If not good enough, then never.  
No pockets for keeping.  
No bed. No window.  
Either a frame or a photograph.  
Either a blank space or a letter in the mail.  
Not a letter, but a postcard.  
Not a postcard, but a gesture, an image of nature.

## Young Professionals in the Rain

If time had chosen a different way.  
If every mistake disappeared.  
The radio tuned to storm & static.  
Here is an elegy for the tide  
that doesn't rise, for our months lost at sea,  
a map of shipwrecks & desire,  
the fold of an envelope, a paper cut.

Science now believes we each have  
our own special place for keeping.  
We each have our own word for loneliness.  
No one saw what was stolen,  
scars rising from skin.  
No one can taste the poison in the water  
but we know it's there. We know  
no other way. In science there is nothing  
to hold on to. The smooth rock  
in my pocket, a body.

In motion or looking to rest.  
No one saw the weather report  
or pretended to know the rain won't stop.  
The storm returns to memory.  
The young professionals in the rain,  
going to work in the latest watches,  
waiting for something to love, something  
to blow up in their faces. To believe in a kind of  
perfection only a child can believe in.

9.25.04

what time            is it            another night            lost  
tripping along                            uneven pavement  
slight hangover    this brick            inescapable  
kids on hoods of cars            September            & noth-  
ing  
passing through    repeat this            breath  
arc            of movement            hands in pockets  
hands of clock            pointing  
to your numbered    self            shattered  
space            bodies folding over            night  
washed out            treeline dissolved into sky  
no stars, no rest            trying too hard & not  
hard enough            your autumn            songs scratching  
the surface            paint            burnt on retina  
trying to make sense of    a study  
of three faces            dimensions of spacetime  
your night a different night            smoke in my lungs  
trying to get            my papers in order            trying  
to tell            gunshots & one  
window over an alley            my indoor voice hushed  
your turned self    turning away            turning  
into            your furtive self  
   the horizon            bubbling  
ready to burst



## Winter Window

If anger fades as it rises, folds itself  
    into a paper crane.  
If happiness never wears a hat or meets  
    itself in the street  
a broken picture frame left on the curb.  
If happiness were a hero smiling  
    down from a parade.  
The snow keeps falling. A door leads  
    to another door to a room  
I've never entered.  
All the shops are locking their gates.  
We hold our hands over our mouths  
    for warmth, huddle over  
what is not being said.  
We have our secrets we prefer to keep.  
We do not trust what is too good.  
A shadow moves beneath the door.  
Winter waits & listens & promises its worst.  
And we go on preferring the intimacy  
    of an empty bed the clock  
that ticks but does not turn.

## After David Shapiro

*dear cloud, free from moral guilt*  
dear calendar, your pages worn  
dear bridge, free from the heart's concerns  
dear train, free from pain  
dear passing, no need for a watch  
dear address, words on your eyelids  
dear lullaby, dear vase of flowers, dear candy store  
dear sun, let go your winter coat  
dear stove, free from yesterday's mistakes  
dear fan blades, turn & turn  
dear song, it's come out all wrong

## Midwinter

Slush on every street corner. To find happiness  
in a red scarf. The hope of oceans & sand folded  
in a tiny crease. Fitting all I can in my hand.  
Another night—broken window—New York skyline.  
The train passes every fifteen minutes—the suggestion  
of space that needs to be filled. The snow falling  
outside is quiet. The boxes on the curb: quiet.  
The boxes covered with snow. Tonight  
the radio is a companion keeping the body warm.  
The streetlight tall & empty. The lamp is quiet.  
Searching for a new vocabulary, a way  
to say exactly what you want to hear.  
I'd like to give all the quiet things to you.  
The hour: traumatized. You've finished one  
chapter but refuse to start the next, prefer instead this  
moment of waiting. To hold on to any one thing  
just a little longer. To hold on to this pain.  
The angry faces in line at the bodega. The cold  
& angry faces waiting for someone to notice.

## House

& opening & opening & the black spray paint on the door & the summer spent tiling the roof & don't walk away & scrubbing blood off the bathroom floor & the splintered hand rail & oak trees & maples & the bird feeder nailed outside the kitchen window & every morning & voices & turning & waking & the pictures crooked on the walls & the buzzing lights & noise from the street & saint of perpetual sorrow & tomorrow & spiders hiding in the cracks & this practice of memory & please listen & hardwood floors & bare feet & the quiet at night & the light in the hallway & the door bell at 3 a.m. & sirens & sleeping & where were you & every summer & growing out of clothes & vegetables for stew & hips & cups of tea & this absence of relief & not now & your quiet self & winter & why & stained carpet & the smell of piss in the hallway & crucifix over your bed & quilt & creaking stairs & echoes & starting over & rusted mailbox & saint of immediate relief & running & muddy shoes & candles & your hands & running & the cracks around your eyes & running & running &

## Apartment 11

last night's sidewalk                      inappropriate proposition  
today new  
jeans & thunderstorms      desire              to be              some-  
where                      away  
from rent                      demands                      & bills  
   the united states  
postal service                      losing  
the evening clear & windy      no rain                      only children  
running                      in the halls                      music  
from a passing                      ice cream truck  
my legs tired but I don't know why              slept late no coffee  
no afternoon  
   casual Saturday & Saturday night  
holding this place  
together with scotch tape & stacks  
   of books                      mint  
tea                      the weekend nearly over                      not  
wanting to face the  
photocopier    & fax machine  
In an attempt to define                      freedom  
I can only say no      no sir  
this isn't it                      all circuits are currently busy  
avenues                      gridlocked  
the night won't      have  
my stupid questions    won't carry

on this  
 stupid game the cat keeps  
 the cockroaches away  
 & the neighborhood sighs  
 tenements  
 lean on my shoulder  
 carrying this alone dear walls  
 please stop  
 your shaking  
 a layer of paint won't  
 fix  
 ceiling falling in &  
 books out of order  
 I know the money in my pocket  
 bills & too  
 little sleep & so it's hard here &  
 everywhere  
 so much depends on the leak  
 in the ceiling  
 my attention turned to leisurebeer cans line the  
 coffee table dirt  
 under my nails soon enough  
 the kids will be back in winter coats  
 the tired cast still trying to  
 make this  
 home breaking the hinges  
 finding a new route  
 missing every pothole  
 & bargain shopper

## Lullaby

Repetition of a still frame. A moment repeats itself.  
This is the history of our hands opening, this action

of a word unfolding. By “this” I mean precisely this  
& the opposite of this. The tension a movement

in opposite directions. Tonight I hold out my hands,  
the open palms hold an absence. Rest your head down

on the pillow. Shut your eyes, sweet love. I’ll never  
tire of wandering these moors. I’ll never give up

the search for the proper words. These shattered notes  
evenly spaced. This song falling into discord.

## A Partial List of Fears

Fear of time travel.  
Fear of needles or pointed objects.  
Fear of numbers.  
Fear of fire.  
Fear of asymmetry.  
Fear of forgetting.  
Fear of poetry.  
Fear of Bolsheviks.  
Fear of mirrors.  
Fear of empty rooms.  
Fear of crowded rooms.  
Fear of being locked in an enclosed place.  
Fear of stairs or of climbing or falling down stairs.  
Fear of the color blue.  
Fear of waves or wave-like motions.  
Fear of dining or dinner conversation.  
Fear of dizziness or whirlpools.  
Fear of skin lesions.  
Fear of objects at the right side of the body.  
Fear of objects at the left side of the body.  
Fear of having committed an unpardonable sin.  
Fear of nosebleeds.  
Fear of hearing good news.  
Fear of the word fear.  
Fear of knees.  
Fear of laughter.  
Fear of crossing bridges.  
Fear of growing old.  
Fear of nudity.



II.  
Notes & Letters



## Yours Truly

The memory of summer unapologetic.  
After my mother died, you wrote the nicest letter  
& I never wrote you back. The road home  
paved with stones & bird skeletons.  
This window makes more sense than last.  
Emptiness replaced by insight.  
Crooked nook, corner stool.  
There are many things I will never own.  
This dream, for example, is not mine.  
I take back everything I told you.

## Love Poem to Someone I Do Not Love

You cover yourself  
with another blanket  
of snow. I wrap myself

inside myself.

You told me not to  
go but I went. You told me  
to come back but I stayed.

And so I gave you New York,

a pompous gesture  
that went unnoticed.  
The same as I saw myself

those final months:

a ghost in the landscape,  
daily rituals set to autodrive,  
& the slow fade

into the background as night

sinks into night & you sit  
at the bar & flirt  
with everyone but me.

As if I could give someone

a city. As if you'd ever want  
what I have to offer.

Dear M—

December never seemed so close—this  
outstretched hand, a greeting, pulling into.  
This bitter pill, a polygraph, caught in my throat.  
Tonight: your voice on the radio & how many years  
has it been? These bones are old, are brittle & always  
breaking. Each day a new face in the mirror,  
never quite getting there but always hinting—  
I want to be precise: I want to tell you this tendency  
is to be discouraged, this leaning & bad posture.  
This sketch is merely a moment unfolding, is not  
to be taken seriously, nothing like last time  
we spoke—two years? three? M, I want to cut  
to the chase: I know you understand this failure,  
this slow dance, this movement into silence.

## I'm not even trying

The ticket lost is long gone.  
I've run out of things to sell.  
The check bounced.  
The phone lost your call  
& then I lost your number.  
I just put water on to boil.  
I became distracted by  
the headline: *Five new ways*  
*to a better body!*  
The train went express.  
I accidentally took one too many  
aspirin. I haven't had  
my morning cup of coffee.

## The Answer

This is all I ask for—to exist. You'd think  
I'd want more, you'd think I'd desire

understanding. But I am glad the earth revolves  
around the sun how it does. I am glad

the earth's rotation axis is tilted 23.5 degrees  
from the sun how it is. You'd think more—

You'd think *never enough, never enough*.  
You'd think somewhere else. But no,

these words have nothing more to offer.  
You'd think *no, no*. You'd think *naughty girl*.

You'd think for *Christ's sake*.

## Travel Notes

7.23.05

My nerves shot from little sleep & too much caffeine.  
Drawing birds on napkins. X marks the spot  
where the bone broke. A name can be changed  
just as easily as it can be forgotten. Setting roses on a coffin  
is something I've seen on tv, but also something I've done  
in my lifetime. The emptiness fills the house,  
seeps into the carpet. Forty-nine years  
shuffles through the living room. And the carpet  
can be cleaned & replaced but that doesn't really change  
anything. I can't explain how I feel except to say  
I'm tired. My eyes ache & my thoughts are of my love  
in New York. Dear Andy, hello. It is 7:15 p.m.  
I opened a beer & my brother is asleep  
in the hotel room. Today has felt like two days  
& tomorrow it will be forgotten amidst flights & errands.  
Last night I dreamt two things I had never dreamt before:  
1) I was drunk, knocking over chairs 2) My grandpa.  
I was at my grandma's & we were trying to go  
to the funeral, but he wouldn't let us leave,  
kept wanting to show us things, to delay that moment  
just a bit longer. I woke up at 3:48 a.m.  
The phone was ringing & it was you drunk on the corner  
of Spring & Broadway. Here Detroit is a ghost town.  
Nothing to do but jot down these little notes.  
Yesterday in London the police shot an innocent man. Today  
I buried my grandpa. And tomorrow something else.  
My parents are trading the latest news from the gossip rags.  
Filling time until morning comes & we each go  
our separate ways, returning to separate lives.  
The night he died, my grandma slept one hour then  
spent the rest of the time just sitting in the living room.



My mom didn't sleep & neither did her sister.  
We have never been good sleepers.  
Is it normal to feel this old & tired  
upon waking to a new day? Or normal not to  
recognize the new day, but to have time pass in a blur.  
The faces lining up to give their condolences.  
A hug & a pat on the back. My brother's flight is at 6:00 a.m.,  
mine is at 10:15 a.m. Plan to get to the airport by 9:00  
& a cup of coffee or two before that. For now: crime shows  
on tv. The forward motion in my chest & stomach.

7.23.05 9:52 p.m.

A margarita later & the world has changed.  
I can exercise my trivia skills at any bar. Now, a glass of water  
& the family around the tv. Another crime show.  
Another escape into Brooklyn. The sky separating into layers,  
peeling back from the pavement & tenements. In Detroit  
everyone is at the bar, huddled over drinks & glowing television  
screens.  
We're waiting on the Tigers. Our lives depend on a baseball  
game.  
I can name my favorite Rolling Stones song but can't tell you  
how I'll make rent next month. I usually say "Paint It, Black"  
but lately have been feeling "Play With Fire."  
Andy's on a bus back to Albany & I'm scheduling my morn-  
ing  
wake-up call. Scheduling my shower & time to say goodbye.  
A shot of whiskey to warm the body. Every Christmas Eve  
was spent in St. Charles, MI. My grandpa would tell stories  
about his wilder days, claiming he never would have  
gotten married had he been sober. It's a joke & everyone  
laughed.  
This weekend I learned my grandpa's birth name was  
Francis Antonio Boggio, Jr. & not Frank Anthony,  
& that for a brief time he worked, like his father had, in a coal  
mine.

7.24.05

At the airport terminal. Today I woke with no voice.  
Last night I tried to explain to my brother that distance  
is unnecessary. He said the book was boring, “like reading a  
diary.”

On Sunday July 19, 1910, Kafka wrote in his diary:

*slept, awoke, slept, awoke, miserable life.*

My eyes heavy, no real sleep last night. In the dim light of the  
airport

everything is blurry. Dear Andy, hello. I miss you.

We each have our own separate lives with limited time together.

I wish people didn't hate me but I can't really stop that.

And there are other things to think about anyhow.

The neighborhood is changing & I don't know what I'm doing  
with my life aside from working hard for too little money.

Everywhere I move becomes a ghost town. I don't know why  
I feel so strongly the need to document this moment, as if I  
don't write down, it never happened.

The airport is a ghetto, no place for a home. My nerves shot &  
another cup of coffee.

I can trade sleep for sleepwalking, memories for movies &  
books.

I re-read *The Sonnets* on my flight to Michigan & can't stop  
thinking about Berrigan's two hundred graves:

*Put away your books! Who shall speak of us  
when we are gone? Let them wear scarves  
in the once a day snow, crying in the kitchen  
of my heart!*

## Saginaw

Dirty shopping carts  
in dirty parking lots.

The future I was promised  
enclosed here in this

brown paper bag.  
The hustle & flow

of a thousand empty  
pockets scraping

against the grey  
sky of unemployment.

Who has forgotten  
their sons, their daughters?

Forget my dreams:  
how things were

going to be different.  
Our single state recession

slumps into the new year.  
Yesterday's paper

listing today's foreclosures.  
My inability to be

what you need me to be.  
My only companion,  
  
a 99 cent cup of coffee.  
The guarantee of something  
  
bottomless waiting for me.

4.14.06

April snow & no  
way to go, no turning  
forward, motion lost  
flickers across the wind-  
shield & is forgotten.  
No scene waiting  
to be seen, no unforgiving  
space, empty drawer  
& shutters shut.  
Outen the light  
on the day, I've no mind  
for logistics,  
tired with time zones.  
Falling backward  
a paper cup brushes  
the curb. I need  
new sleep to wake  
new places, new math  
to fix my tax return.  
April snow & no  
one spoke, we just sat  
there & let ourselves be  
covered. The day  
collapses, my eyes  
hurt & two cups  
of coffee. The window  
scrapes & nothing moves.  
The shipment sits  
in customs.

## A Partial List of Fears

Fear of saints or holy things.  
Fear of Hegel.  
Fear of road travel.  
Fear of glass.  
Fear of sleep or being hypnotized.  
Fear of doctors or going to a doctor.  
Fear of voids or empty spaces.  
Fear of movement or motion.  
Fear of the knee bending backwards.  
Fear of cosmic phenomena.  
Fear of having to balance.  
Fear of words.  
Fear of rabies or of becoming insane.  
Fear of machines or of robots.  
Fear of being bound or tied up.  
Fear of memories.  
Fear of moths.  
Fear of myths, stories or false statements.  
Fear of death or of dead things.  
Fear of new drugs.  
Fear of Nihilism.  
Fear of the dark, of night, or of nightfall.  
Fear of gaining weight.  
Fear of vehicles.  
Fear of the figure 8.  
Fear of rain or of being rained on.  
Fear of snakes.  
Fear of being stared at.  
Fear of heaven.





III.  
Homecoming



## Forecast

The sea will flood & flood. Years spent wandering.  
Ten years of rain will be followed by ten years of drought.  
One year of decadence will be followed by one year of plague.  
Our bellies will be full & then they will be empty.  
The sun will rise & fall. Day will eclipse into darkness.  
We will learn the curve of our spines—the exact arc of our ribs.  
The land will turn to ash. Food: ash.  
Speech will be whispered. Words: ash in our mouths.  
We will no longer trust our neighbors or our families.  
We will no longer trust ourselves. Night after night spent in  
solitude.  
All questions will go unasked, lost in a landscape of memory.  
We will be trapped somewhere between sleeping & waking.  
We each will experience our own exile, our own state of waiting.

## The Waiting

*after Marina Tsvetaeva*

The wounded in winter imagine the spring.

The wounded in winter falling  
& falling. The wounded in winter set back

each clock.

The wounded in winter keep their dead—they stitch each ghost  
to their sleeves.

The wounded in winter

take all the books from the shelves. They whisper *there was  
a body, it wanted to live*. The wounded in winter picture  
an empty house & burning letters. (Always this burning  
for the wounded in winter.)

The wounded in winter count backwards, peel back  
the floorboards. Absently they turn  
page after page in search of a prayer. The wounded in winter  
feel the dirt beneath their nails.

## Prayer

for example: a pillar of salt

## Drought

Leaves fold in on themselves, words fold in—  
color fading at the edges, crisp & shattering

at a touch. Silent bird, sing me a song.  
The plants withering, whisper of mistrust.

Who has plucked the voice from your throat?  
Who has plucked the rain from the clouds,

the clouds from the sky? Even the sun  
is poisonous. All summer going into &

coming out of doors, looking at graphs  
& charting numbers, handling dry leaves

of old books. The fingers loose their sense  
of touch. The body, no longer hungry.

There is no shade to rest under, just dry air,  
absence of wind. Watch the grass burn & burn.

Silent bird, who filled our mouths with sand?  
Who said the secret to flying was forgetting to land?

## Return

Your words are masks but I speak clearly,  
say *it was your hunger that brought you*

*here.* Week after week you come back  
& smile, draw convoluted lines.

Sometimes you keep to yourself, others  
you ask for help—as if you cared

what I had to say. I say *you signed up*  
*for this trip.* I say *welcome to the torture*

*show.* You say you come from the mountains,  
you say there are such pretty birds there,

but you don't say it like you mean it.  
On a paper plate you draw a face, attach

a string & wear it over your face. You say  
you're smiling behind the plate. I say *fine,*

*fine, I've had enough.* You say *keep quiet*  
*little girl, it will all be over soon.*

## January

Days like this are sometimes forgotten, x'd out and shelved with all the rest. There is an absence of birds, although at times their wings beat against my ribs.

Today: a new arrangement of clocks and the branches are bare. I wanted you to know that I believed you when you said this year the spring will be difficult. Snow is falling & won't go away. I just wanted you to know these are the unhappiest of rocking chairs.

This deterioration is common, can be found everywhere, rests in the space between each word, within each word. Mark the way my breath hangs in the air. I just wanted you to know this is a time for heavy blanketing. I wanted you to know this is a specific "I" addressing a specific "you."

What I am trying to say is this distance is troubling. I am trying to say two opposite tendencies are at work here. These thoughts no longer directed towards you, but

the idea of you. I want you to know

the suspension of time, the waiting, the way I've been cut out of my environment and stitched back in.



## The Dare

The first room is a ghost—another's hand  
pressed into your hand. You, a lost Alice,  
tumbling through the dark woods,  
your new dress ruined.  
In this room, you are your own heroine running  
& running & never looking back.

The second room: a coffin. You trace  
chalk marks on the wall & with each step  
a new face, a new story to be told. You wait.  
Sometimes there is food. Sometimes  
there is nothing. You remember  
chalk on the lapel:  
the  $\times$  for mental defect.

The third room is a fever. You rest  
against the door, palms pressed flat  
upon the surface. The third room never tells.  
The third room burns right through you.

## March

Each day's story folded  
into squares, little address,  
stitching together  
this month's narrative.  
'Today's theme: darkness—

x-ing out the eyes.  
'This lions roar is ritual—wind  
scraping my cheeks.

All month  
the ghosts push  
themselves inside

the frames hanging on these  
walls. They've been counting  
each second, digging cemeteries  
on the insides of my arms.

And morning: the walk  
to the subway notes the return  
of birds—their songs breaking open—

## Self-Portrait as a Mirror

Hello empty space, hello  
constant shifting—

little disaster, little idea  
of home always somewhere  
out of reach. You might

think edgier. You might think  
this is not the way. Perhaps  
something else. Something sharper  
or shinier, some undefined other.  
But no, this is not so.

Do not be deceived—

these words can cut  
glass. This emptiness  
pushed

inside a frame. This emptiness  
is more than you would know:

infinite regression, or a reflection  
of a white wall, little bird,  
little how-do-you-do.

## Sonnet Beginning with Lines by Robert Creeley

I see the flames, etc. But do not care, etc.  
I watch the sunset, etc. But do not care, etc.  
I'll leave a tip, etc. But skip out on the bill, etc.  
I see the spirit, etc. But lost all hope, etc.  
There was a crooked man, etc. With a crooked smile, etc.  
There was a cause, etc. But it has been lost, etc.  
I sing it in the morning, etc. I sing it in the evening, etc.  
There established a pattern, etc. But I do not care, etc.  
This is something different, etc. This is necessary, etc.  
Time passes, etc. But I do not care, etc.  
The rain keeps falling, etc. The wind keeps blowing, etc.  
I have grown old, etc. I feel it in my bones, etc.  
I have grown tired, etc. I sleep all day, etc.  
I misremember, etc. But do not care, etc.

## The Functioning

To those hands that fix, hurts smoothly  
To these hands that repair  
To be tended & to become injured  
To the father in the end of these hands  
To the bowl of fruit carefully picked  
To be stretched & to become injured easy  
To be tended & to begin again  
To those hands when wicked  
To those hands when young & unanswerable  
To be stuffy & to come to easy injury  
To those hands that fix & arrive handsome  
To the hands building a new structure  
To the hands at the end of the road  
To be bent & twisted metal  
To be held up for all to see  
To these hands folded, secure in rest  
To be carefully paced & meticulously planned  
To the hands rhythmic  
To the smooth hurt in the end of the hands  
To these hands beautiful, arriving  
To the night of the hands opening  
To be lost & to be found in the end of these hands  
To those hands that bend smooth hurt  
To be hurt smoothly & to arrive  
To the ease of these hands  
To the ease in the end of these hands

## The Dance

Everywhere your stale breath, your tired song.  
Smoke collects at the ceiling. Is it fair  
to say you made me this way—the crooked smile,  
the rotten tooth? Is it fair to say you made me?  
The table is dusty & the chairs broken.  
I haven't slept in weeks. This isn't how  
it is supposed to be—your desire cracks & pops,  
makes a left turn. You say you want to make this  
home—the broken clock, the rusted nail, the sign  
out front that says stop. But you never listen.  
Listen for a moment my dear & you will hear  
the slight tremble: feel the floor begin to shake.  
See the tide turn now. See the rats come running.

## Rilke

the death and the life                      of it                      the face  
of a boy  
the person of a boy of it    this speaks the death and the life  
in the mouth                      a death and a life in the mouth  
read face of a boy                      the person of the boy  
of it                      this comes from a distance  
this comes by far                      indescribably arrives something  
in the mouth                      the person of the boy of the test  
the person  
of the boy of the test of it                      indescribably arrives  
a little bit slowly to a mouth                      the death  
speaks it  
the death and the life                      this speaks the death  
and the life in the mouth

## Perpetual Motion

*after Barbara Guest*

Under the stone—  
trembling. This little dosage.  
Instruct a landscape:

a robin dead  
on the sidewalk, one wing  
sticking up in the air,  
as if refusing  
to stop. As if it never  
needed rest—

to simply say: “No  
thank-you, I’m doing quite well  
on my own.”

Look through  
the darkened window:  
the poem at midnight.  
A row of independent mirrors:  
*Little ghost, what are you thinking?*  
*What keeps you up?*

Carve your face in a tree.  
It will always be this way:  
the same wrong word.  
Instruct a wound.  
Instruct a wound to heal.



## The Trap

Endearing insistence. Forgetful prey.  
This house has burned for 900 nights.

So it goes: tiny comfort, a brief surprise.  
The acting out of something sinister.

Wicked little chore, wicked little  
here-&-there, burn & burn & burn.

Lonely pioneer. Ignoble officer.  
In the box: the framed syntax.

Trace the edges. The rat banking  
against the walls. Revile this act.

Sing it twice & it's twice as nice.

## Homecoming

All week I've been moving in & out of my body.  
Mirror-window. Shadow-self. Trick-or-turn.  
The light is gone from the window.  
And the curtains, the curtains, unmentionable.

## A Partial List of Fears

Fear of spelling mistakes.  
Fear of suffering or of disease.  
Fear of parasites.  
Fear of swallowing, eating or being eaten.  
Fear of philosophy.  
Fear of daylight or sunshine.  
Fear of choking or being smothered.  
Fear of beards.  
Fear or abnormal dislike of politicians.  
Fear of rivers or running water.  
Fear of quartets or of being drawn and quartered.  
Fear of progress.  
Fear of stuttering.  
Fear of being tickled by feathers.  
Fear of old things or traveling back in time.  
Fear of the color red.  
Fear of Satan.  
Fear of writing in public.  
Fear of silence.  
Fear of trains, railroads or train travel.  
Fear of being evaluated negatively in social situations.  
Fear of dependence on others.  
Fear of crosses or crucifixes.  
Fear of symmetry.  
Fear of being buried alive or of cemeteries.  
Fear of taking tests.  
Fear of the sea.  
Fear of one's stepfather.  
Fear of picnics.



IV.  
A Model Year



## A Model Year

The ground shifts but no one notices the spinning.  
No one notices the stop light or the time I said no.

Three years time folds into a single instant.  
Structures re-build themselves & everyone moves forward.

Always wanting what we can't have, we create tension  
one word at a time. Pulling the narrative away until we're lost

& it's lost, left behind in the restaurant or on the subway.  
The little bird in the tree re-builds its nest, the cat

watches through the window, wanting. Always wanting  
what we can't afford, some leisure time or a casual hello.

Attempting to fill an empty space with anything:  
yesterday's news, photographs, a box of buttons &

loose thread. Trying to keep my eyes open after a bad dream.  
Don't let me fall again. There's only so much a body can take

but still stupid desire. To attempt a composition, a theory  
of migration. Hands gathered in the lap, syntax folding

in the mouth. This testament to a year, a document  
of your travels. Something to fill the space.

Something to fill space but still the body waits.  
Attention shifts & fills itself with birds in the distance,  
  
a car horn, children throwing rocks in the street.  
In the distance, an echo. Thought interrupted by  
  
phone lines. To create structure out of broken pavement,  
a cup of coffee or any welcoming thing. Move forward  
  
without hurt. Build your day around re-setting the clocks:  
rise & fall & compile a new grocery list.  
  
Sweep the floor on Sundays. It's easy to fall in a dream.  
Easy to confuse foolishness for generosity, a bathtub  
  
for a sensory deprivation tank. One day you wake  
& everything has changed. Time has erased so much,  
  
taking from you all the people you once loved.  
Each movement becomes measured, how  
  
you reach for the change in your pocket.  
It's easy for the body to peel after it has been burned.  
  
Easy to push forward & no one will notice  
how you reach for change & the leaves turn.



No one will notice when you fall. The ground  
shifts & the pavement catches up with you, meets

your chin. And when it happens, the body ages.  
Ten years pass but you think instead of youth.

Afternoons spent dirty & riding bikes, tin cans  
tied to tree branches. Where once there was a we

there is now an I, an imagined you.  
Where once there was a witness to distance,

time folds into an envelope. I am trying to step  
outside the body, for the body to push forward, always.

To take a command & go without injury. As if  
following orders were as easy as brushing your teeth

or any domestic thing. To make a space for one's self.  
The cat asleep in the window. A new set of silverware,

pictures to frame for the walls. Comfort in the most tedious  
of things. A way to make the time pass.

A way to make the time pass is as good as any  
validation, any idea of happiness, opening

a new book, finding solace in preparing dinner.  
Moving to L.A. or Toronto has never been

the answer. The home we built made sense  
if only for a brief time. The dream in which I'm falling

& startle myself awake has always been here.  
I couldn't watch the images on tv, bodies

hurtling through space. Push inside yourself.  
Paint the living room orange.

Buy new curtains to block out the sun. When  
you didn't have to go to work, you slept,

filled whole days with sleep. Waking to eat,  
smoke a cigarette, have a drink. It's easy to fall

for a dream. Easy to pretend the flowers are blooming  
specifically for you, or the walk home a yellow brick road.

Attempt to make sense of wanting, make sense  
of the empty seat across the table.

Moving has never been the answer but always  
an understandable response to the empty seat

across the table. Threads come loose & the button  
needs to be re-sewn. Time to trade sweaters

for short sleeves. The sun on the skin acting  
as an agent of love to keep you golden & warm.

To hold you in memory golden & warm.  
An afternoon nap in the park. The body continues

to grow, moves forward, guarded.  
Memory like loose thread unravels, re-builds,

constructs a new sequence of events.  
Remembered faces that were never there, never

a part of this story. Forgive me if I repeat,  
I don't know where else to go.

No new words to explain my appearance here today.  
No new words for today & waking & sleeping.

I've attempted to re-trace my steps,  
looked the last place I was.

Re-trace & re-learn. Return home to the daily  
tasks, making pasta in the kitchen the heat

is inescapable. Bare feet flat against wood  
floor & it's still two months till August.

The neighborhood is heating up,  
more bodies on the street

each day. More voices till the early hours  
of the morning. Broken streetlights &

the train passing overhead. Impossible to drink  
the glass of water while it's still cold.

When standing in the door of the refrigerator  
isn't enough. When the promise of fall &

the return of jackets is not enough. Another year  
passes & the body is tired. Falling into a dream,

an escape from monthly bills & worries  
of money & debt. When I last dreamed of you,

there was a hole in your side. A fist-sized hole.  
I reached for you & reached my hand right through.

The act of reaching for another causes  
such misery that it's easy to forget the good.

The memory of New Year's replaced  
with the memory of packing boxes.

Every new failure returns to this. The ground shifts  
& everything goes on without you, without me.

A car runs a red light & strikes a child on a bike.  
The cat licks his claws clean having satisfied

his urge to hunt. The tape rewinds & begins again.  
The question of how long things can go on this way

is answered with always of course.

Always. I know this but still can't stop.

There are no rules for this. Things are easier  
when there's a code of behavior. Waiting

for Saturday to pass into Sunday & Sunday  
into the work week so one knows what to do

with their time. Language neither the problem  
nor the cure, just something to occupy myself with.

No one taught me the softness of the quilt  
against my cheek. It was something I could only

learn myself. No one taught me how to deal  
with emotion. How to handle restless nights.

& so I lied when I said I didn't know how  
I got here: a series of bad mistakes & misjudgments.

A touch of idealism. Hope then disappointment.  
Really I've traveled nowhere. Standing in the same place

for three years. Still wearing the same blue jeans,  
only now a hole in the knee.

After three years, the skin is a little thicker.  
Bruises have come & gone. The body moves

between sickness & health, slips between sheets  
each night. There may be new scars, a story for each.

It's easy to pretend nothing exists outside  
your four corners, your own little concerns.

Easy to turn off the tv & not read the papers.  
It's easier not to make decisions but to just allow

things to happen, hereby escaping any culpability.  
Blame it on bad luck & not bad decisions.

A blank page can mean a fresh start or nothing  
to say. This line of thought will continue &

I can map its progress, using tacks & colored string.  
It's easy to pretend that I'm the only one who feels

this way, or feels anything so acutely. Confusing  
one's self for the center of the world, & then

news of a death in the family, a roadside bomb, &  
protesters killed by their government shatters everything.

The shattering of everything has become a way  
of life. The ground shifts, no one notices.

It's wrong to make either one of us out as criminals.  
It's wrong to fill this longing with a haircut

& new shoes. Wrong when we run into each other  
on the street to pretend no hurt exists or offer

a casual hello. There are no rules, no guide  
to get through the day. Always wanting

what we can't have, the attempts  
to make sense of it have failed.

Days progress & add up & the calendar changes.  
We pour a new cup of coffee, cover ourselves

with new blankets, separately. The sun shifts  
through the window & the cat sleeps, his leg twitches.

It's easy to close my eyes & think of falling. Easy to feel  
the body collapse on the bed, the mattress rushing to meet you.



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